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Viewing cable 08CAIRO255, DEFMIN TANTAWI SAYS EGYPT READY TO MEET ISRAEL AND

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08CAIRO255**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08CAIRO255	2008-02-11 15:25	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Cairo

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2018
TAGS: PREL PTER MARR KPAL EG IS
SUBJECT: DEFMIN TANTAWI SAYS EGYPT READY TO MEET ISRAEL AND
PA ON GAZA

Classified By: DCM Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of Defense Tantawi told A/S Welch February 7 that he would welcome a visit by Israeli Defense Minister Barak or Amos Gilad to discuss moving forward with solving the Gaza border crisis. Tantawi said that he personally would not object to four-way talks involving the PA, Egypt, Israel, and U.S., but that was a "political decision" and would need final approval from others, including EGIS Chief Omar Soliman and Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit. End summary.

¶ 2. (C) NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch and Ambassador Ricciardone met February 7 with Egyptian Minister of Defense Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi. (Joining Tantawi were Assistant Minister of Defense for Policy MG Ahmed Al Assar, Assistant Minister of Defense for Armament MG Fouad Abdel Halim, and Director of Military Intelligence MG Murad Mowafy. OMC Chief MG Collings, L/FO Jonathan Schwartz, NSC Michael Pascual, and ECPD Min-Couns William Stewart, notetaker, joined A/S Welch and Ambassador Ricciardone.) Tantawi began the hour-long meeting by reporting that the situation at Rafah on the Gaza border was "calm." "But we must do something to stop Hamas."

¶ 3. (C) A/S Welch said that the U.S. has three goals in Gaza, which we hoped Egypt shared: denying Hamas any political advantage, and ensuring that the victory clearly goes to the PA and President Abbas; ensuring that the sovereignty and security of Egypt and Israel are protected; and regulating the border between Egypt and Gaza in a better way. While Hamas' breaching of the border wall was not good, it nevertheless presented an opportunity to move forward, and for Egypt to strengthen its position on the border and improve its image in the United States.

¶ 4. (C) Tantawi stressed that the Gaza problem did not belong to Egypt alone -- it affects Israel and the United States, too. Thus, the effort needed to address it should not come only from Egypt, but from all those affected. You must try to convince Israel to stop cutting off humanitarian supplies to the Palestinians, Tantawi said. "Not all Gazans are Hamas." The trouble is that when Israel tightens the siege around Gaza, "thousands of innocent men, women, and children suffer." As the pressure increases, the inevitable explosion of people will be against Egypt, Tantawi said, not Israel, because "the Palestinians know the Israelis will shoot them but we won't." And this is exactly what happened when Hamas breached the border wall and tens of thousands Palestinians flooded into Egypt, creating chaos. "This is what Hamas wants."

¶ 5. (C) A/S Welch asked Tantawi if he had been in communication with the Israelis on this issue. We talk all the time, Tantawi said, "but they do not always respond." What we need, he continued, is not a military solution, since we do not face an army on the other side of the border, but civilians. Instead, the three of us -- the U.S., Israel, and Egypt -- need to sit together and find a political solution. If terrorists are able to exploit this situation, Tantawi said, all of us will be losers.

¶ 6. (C) A/S Welch responded that there would be four losers -- including the Palestinians. Tantawi agreed. The Egyptians have tried to get the PA and Hamas to work together to address the Gaza border issue, but they have very deep divisions. We are forced to deal with Hamas on the tactical level, Tantawi said -- they are the ones on the other side of the border. A/S Welch stressed that the United States believes in dealing only with the PA; we do not believe in dealing with Hamas. It is very important that Hamas not be seen as the authority. All the political credit for solving this crisis must go to Egypt, Israel, the U.S. and the PA -- not Hamas.

¶ 7. (C) A/S Welch stressed that it was important for Egypt, Israel, and the PA to come out of the border crisis stronger, and in a better position politically. For example, Egypt's image in the U.S. before the border crisis had been one of not doing enough to stop the tunneling and smuggling under the border into Gaza. To change that image, Egypt should strengthen the border wall and tighten up its border controls. Tantawi noted that the U.S. also had border problems; "Can you control your border with Mexico one hundred percent?" It is important to understand that smuggling is dangerous for Egypt, too, Tantawi said. The real reason for Egypt's poor image in the U.S., Tantawi continued, is that some people -- "you know who" -- spread false stories that distort the true image of Egypt. The fact

is that we are doing our best. But we need help. We have asked many times to increase our border guard forces. Now we only have 750 men to guard a border that is 14 kilometers with Gaza, 20 kilometers on the coast, and 20 kilometers deep. But the Israelis will not allow us to increase our border guard forces, and then they blame us for smuggling and tunneling.

¶ 8. (C) Nonetheless, Israel respects you, A/S Welch stressed. "And we respect Israel," Tantawi said. If we did not respect each other, it would be a disaster. Dialogue with Israel is the key to resolving these issues, A/S Welch offered. You both have a common interest in maintaining security in the region, an interest the U.S. shares. We all have a chance now to change the situation for the better; we need higher-level political dialogue now. A/S Welch said he thought the Israelis would be willing to participate in a four-way meeting, and offered to propose it to them. He added that if Israeli DefMin Barak visits Egypt or sends someone such as Amos Gilad, he should talk to Tantawi and Director of Military Intelligence MG Mowafi. Tantawi agreed. Ambassador Ricciardone clarified that Egypt would not object to the PA attending such a meeting. That is a political decision, Tantawi said, and you should discuss with EGIS Chief Omar Soliman Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit first. A/S Welch said he would do so, underscoring that it was important for everyone that Hamas not be handed a victory.

¶ 9. (U) A/S Welch did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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